



Austin Transit Partnership

Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project

Coordination Plan

Update

Austin, TX
April 2024
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Term/Acronym	Definition
ATP	Austin Transit Partnership
CapMetro	Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority
City	City of Austin
EIS	environmental impact statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
LRT	light rail transit
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PEL	Planning and Environmental Linkages
Project	Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project
ROD	Record of Decision
TPWD	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

1 Introduction

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) are completing an environmental review of the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project (the Project) in Austin, Texas.

FTA and ATP (the Lead Agencies) prepared this Coordination Plan (Plan) in accordance with *Efficient Environmental Reviews for Project Decision-Making and One Federal Decision*, 23 U.S.C. 139. The Plan describes how the Lead Agencies have divided environmental review responsibilities and how the Lead Agencies will provide opportunity for agency and public participation in and comment on the environmental review process for the Project. **This document supplants the April 2024 Project Coordination Plan, with updates noted in “red” text.**

Because the Project is likely to cause significant impacts on the environment, the Lead Agencies are preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Project. The EIS is being prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), FTA’s environmental regulations, and other applicable requirements.

1.1 Roles and Responsibilities

FTA is acting as federal lead agency in the EIS because ATP intends to seek federal funding through FTA’s Capital Investment Grants program. FTA is responsible for managing the EIS and will ensure all environmental investigations, reviews, and consultation are coordinated as a single process in compliance with applicable environmental requirements.

ATP is the independent local government corporation responsible for the implementation, planning, design, financing, execution, and oversight of the Project. ATP, serving as joint lead agency and Project sponsor, will prepare the EIS and supporting documentation consistent with FTA’s procedures. In addition, ATP will ensure Project stakeholders can participate in and comment on the EIS.

Both Lead Agencies are responsible for considering and responding to comments received from agencies on matters within the special expertise or jurisdiction of those agencies.

1.2 Coordination Plan Goals

This Plan describes activities that have taken place and will take place during the environmental review process. The Lead Agencies will update this Plan, as needed, based on feedback they receive or if the Project changes. The Lead Agencies have the following goals for this Plan:

- Goal 1: Provide early coordination with agencies and the public.
- Goal 2: Enable a more efficient environmental review.
- Goal 3: Facilitate Project decision-making.
- Goal 4: Coordinate transparently.

2 Project Description

The Project is a 9.8-mile light rail transit (LRT) branched line extending north, south, and east of downtown Austin. **Figure 1 depicts the Preferred Alternative evaluated in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), distributed for community review and comment in January 2025.** Beginning at the intersection of Guadalupe Street and 38th Street, the in-street, LRT-dedicated, double-tracked, 15-station alignment would extend south past the University of Texas and the Texas State Capitol building. At the intersection of Guadalupe Street and 3rd Street, the alignment would turn east on 3rd Street, cross Congress Avenue, and connect to Trinity Street. The alignment would continue south on Trinity Street and cross Lady Bird Lake on a new LRT-dedicated bridge. On the south shore of Lady Bird Lake, the alignment would connect to East Riverside Drive, where it would split into two branches. The western branch would cross East Bouldin Creek, extend south on Congress Avenue, and terminate at the intersection of Congress Avenue and Oltorf Street. From East Riverside Drive, the eastern branch of the alignment would continue southeast along East Riverside Drive and terminate just west of State Highway 71 at the proposed Yellow Jacket station.

The Project includes an Operations and Maintenance Facility near the U.S. Highway 183 / State Highway 71 interchange with Airport Commerce Drive in a light-industrial/commercial use area. The Operations and Maintenance Facility would include space for administration, operations and maintenance staff, a light rail control center, and light rail vehicle maintenance. The Operations and Maintenance Facility would also serve as a light rail vehicle storage yard with the capacity to support both light rail vehicle operations and fleet storage. The Operations and Maintenance Facility would include adjacent Maintenance of Way shop locations and associated light rail equipment storage functions.

The Project would include three park-and-rides located near the system termini at 38th Street, Oltorf Street, and Yellow Jacket Lane. The Project would include traction power substations spaced approximately 1 mile apart. Train control and communication cabinets, similar in size to traffic signal intersection cabinets, would be located approximately 0.5 mile apart along the alignment.

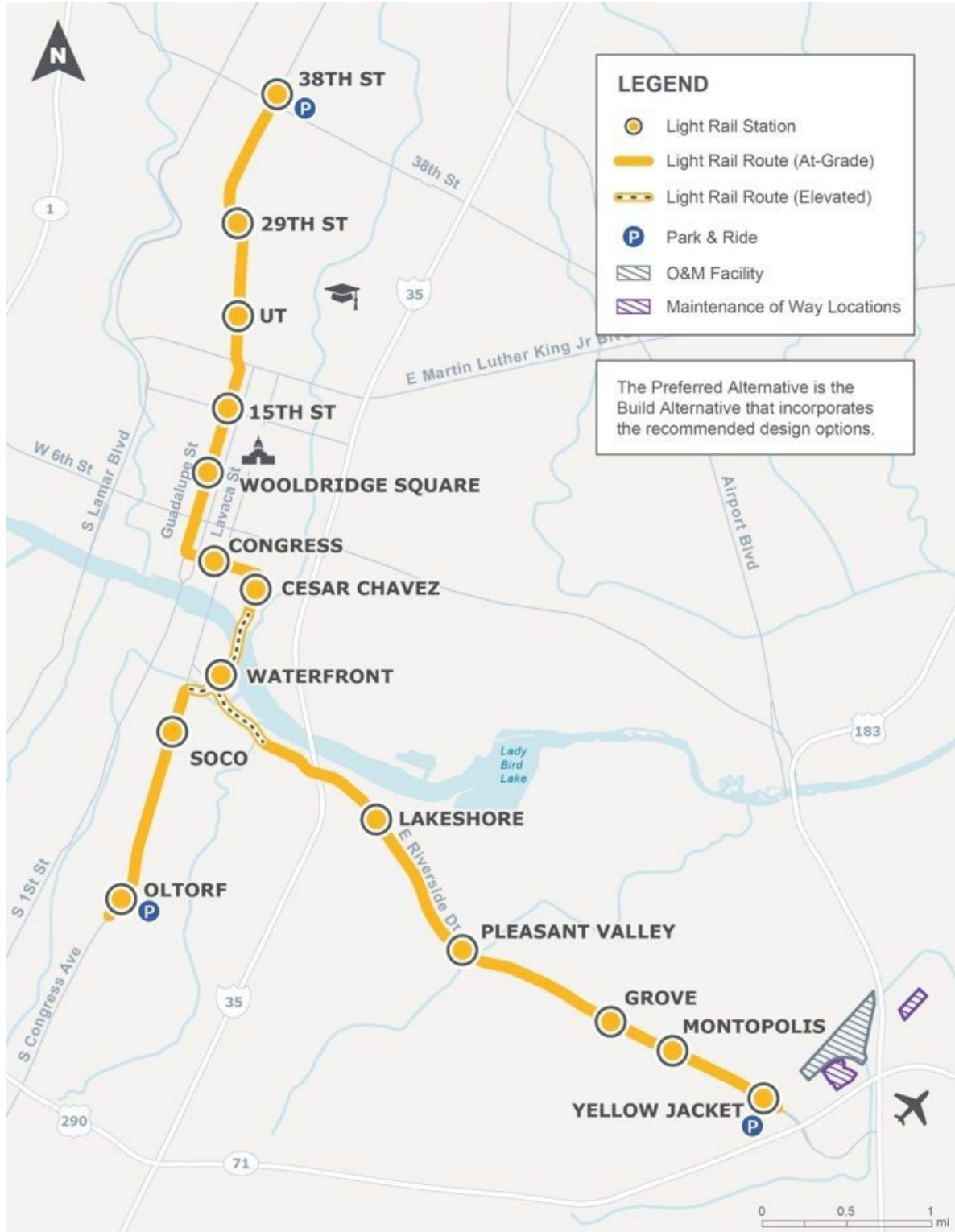
2.1 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Project is to meet growing corridor travel demand with a reliable, safe, cost-effective, time-competitive, sustainable, and equitable light rail system. The lack of transportation options and limited roadway capacity to accommodate growth in central Texas may hinder the continued vitality and economic health of Austin and surrounding areas in the future. Inadequate transit access and rising travel demand have resulted in longer travel times, decreased mobility, and additional travel costs for residents and businesses. The Project is needed to:

- increase transportation network capacity to meet existing travel demand;
- sustainably support Austin's population and employment growth;
- improve transit access between affordable housing and jobs; and

- support growth of and connectivity to regional activity centers designated in local land use plans.

Figure 1: Preferred Alternative Evaluated in the Draft EIS (January 2025)



2.2 Planning History

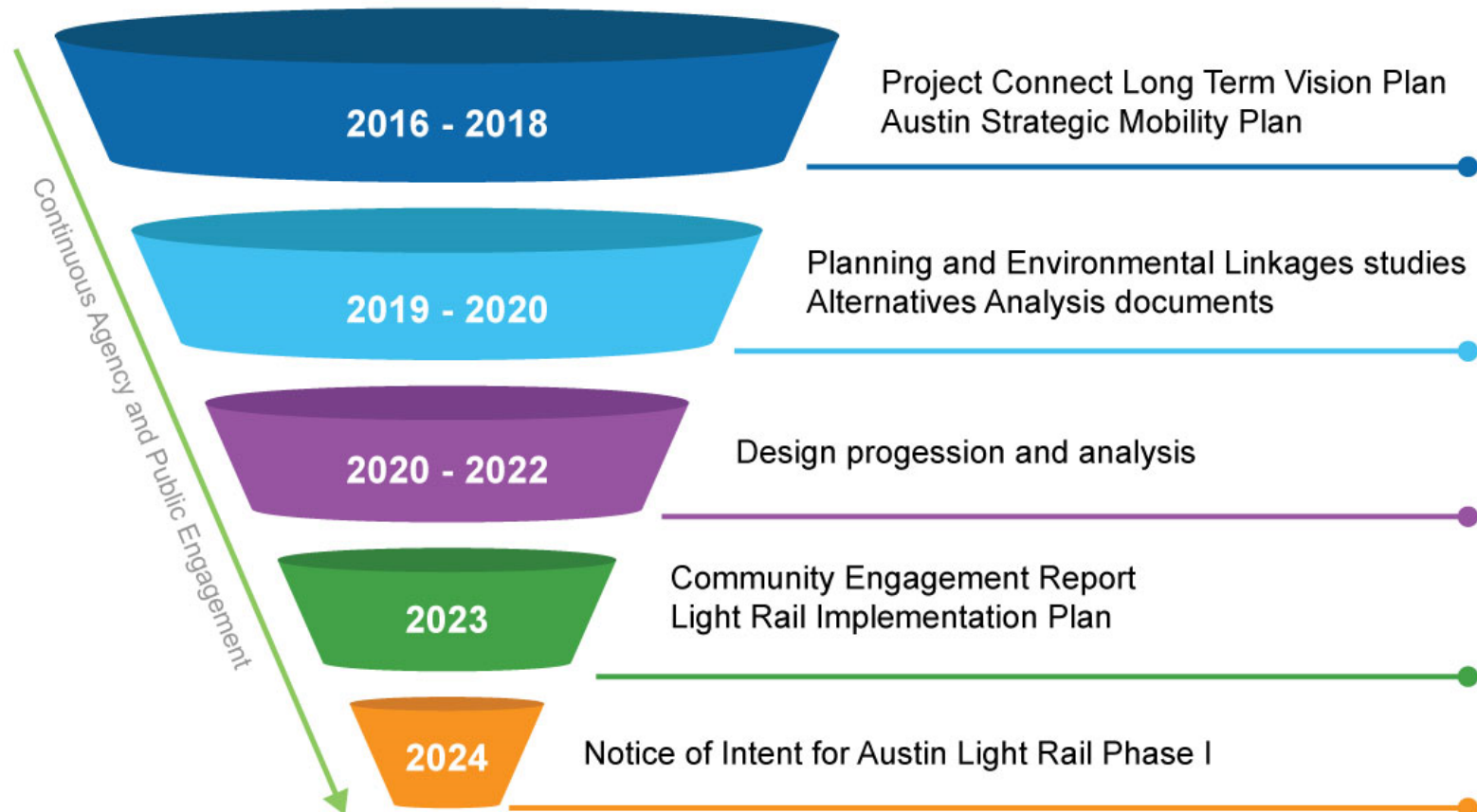
Planning for high-capacity transit in the Austin metropolitan area began over two decades ago to address congestion on the capacity-constrained roadway network and accommodate the significant population and employment growth projected for the area. This planning led to the *Project Connect Long-Term Vision Plan*, which included high-capacity transit corridors (CapMetro 2018). The vision plan was included as an integral part of the *Austin Strategic Mobility Plan*, approved by the Austin City Council in 2019 (City of Austin 2019). In 2020, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization adopted its *2045 Regional Transportation Plan*, which included the high-capacity transit corridors as priority transit capital investments. In November 2020, voters approved Proposition A, an increase in the City's property tax rate, to provide local funding for the Project Connect program, a program of transit improvements that included light rail in Austin.

Under Project Connect, transit planners originally planned for two LRT lines in Austin, one line running north and south of downtown (Orange Line) and another running downtown east to the airport (Blue Line) (CapMetro 2020a, 2020b). As planners advanced the design work on these two lines, the estimated construction, operation, and maintenance costs increased. The primary cost drivers were increasing real estate costs, inflation, supply chain cost escalations, and scope refinements. It soon became clear that the original LRT lines warranted a re-evaluation to ensure ATP could deliver high-capacity transit that was fiscally feasible, aligned with the 2020 tax referendum passed by the voters, and remained responsive to the needs of the public.

Throughout 2022 and 2023, ATP developed a new light rail implementation plan that it viewed as more viable considering the constraints. This new plan was for a single LRT line that ran largely along the same corridors as the Orange and Blue Lines and would similarly meet the area's transportation needs.

On June 6, 2023, ATP, the City, and CapMetro unanimously approved the Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project (as defined in Section 1) to advance into the next phase of implementation. **Figure 2** shows the progression of planning done for light rail in Austin. This includes continuous agency and public coordination throughout this time.

Figure 2: Progression of Austin Light Rail Phase 1 Project



3 Environmental Review Process

FTA's transportation planning regulations (23 Code of Federal Regulations 450.212 and 450.318) encourage a concept known as Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL). PEL embraces the idea that transportation planning and the environmental review process are integrated. Information, analysis, and products developed during transportation planning can be incorporated into and relied upon during subsequent environmental review. As long as transportation planning products are readily available for agency and public review, they may be incorporated by reference in the environmental review process. The hope is that PEL may shorten environmental review and lead to better project decisions for both transportation and the environment.

The Lead Agencies applied PEL principles when developing alternatives for the Project and selecting one preferred alternative to analyze in the EIS. They relied on decisions made during the transportation planning process, and those decisions were documented and analyzed through applicable public involvement. Those decisions included determining the transportation needs of the area, defining the Project's purpose, selecting its general travel corridor, screening alternatives, and choosing the preferred transit mode.

Relying on the prior PEL planning, the EIS will evaluate two alternatives: a No Build Alternative and a Build Alternative. The No Build Alternative is included in the EIS for comparison purposes. The Build Alternative includes the Project, as described in Section 2, and six Design Options, mostly affecting station locations. Each Design Option will be evaluated to identify a Preferred Alternative. Regardless of which Design Options are ultimately chosen, the Project would continue to provide light rail service to the north, south, and east areas of Austin, as originally envisioned.

3.1 Scoping Process

The Lead Agencies formally initiated the Project's environmental review process on January 19, 2024, when they [published a notice of intent to prepare an EIS](#) in the *Federal Register*. A 45-day scoping period followed where ATP briefed agencies and the public about the Project and solicited comment on significant issues the EIS should address. During this time, ATP hosted six public scoping meetings (five in-person meetings and one virtual, online meeting), attended by nearly 500 individuals with nearly 4,000 comments received from the community on the project. ~~ATP considered all comments received and is currently preparing a report that will summarize the scoping process and what ATP heard from stakeholders during this time. ATP will provide the report, when available, to all participating agencies and post it on [ATP's Project website](#).~~ *The Project's Phase 1 Project Scoping Summary Report (May 2024) is available on [ATP's Project Website](#).*

3.2 Draft Environmental Impact Statement

After considering scoping comments, the Lead Agencies will prepare a Draft EIS that will evaluate the preferred alternative, including preferred Design Options, and describe why they eliminated other alternatives from detailed study. The Draft EIS will summarize the studies,

reviews, consultations, and coordination required by environmental law or executive order, to the extent appropriate, at this stage in the process. The Lead Agencies expect to complete the Draft EIS in **January 2025** and will circulate it for comment for ~~at least 45~~ **60** days. The Lead Agencies expect to hold public hearings on the Draft EIS. They will give appropriate notice of the time and location of the hearings.

3.3 Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

After circulation of the Draft EIS and consideration of comments received, FTA intends to issue a combined Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) in Fall 2025, pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 139(n)(2), unless statutory criteria preclude issuance of a combined document. The Lead Agencies will coordinate with partner agencies, as needed, to provide an overview of the changes in the Final EIS from the Draft EIS and review mitigation commitments for the preferred alternative. The Final EIS and ROD will not include a comment period. The ROD will be FTA's final agency action under NEPA and will conclude the EIS process.

3.4 Other Environmental Requirements

The environmental review process may include other environmental requirements. Typically, FTA meets these requirements through the EIS process. Other requirements include, but are not limited to, Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act, Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Each of these requirements has its own coordination process. The Lead Agencies expect to satisfy this additional coordination through the EIS process and prior to FTA issuing a Final EIS and ROD.

3.4.1 Section 4(f) Coordination

Section 4(f) protects significant publicly owned parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, as well as significant historic sites, whether they are publicly or privately owned. FTA will provide opportunities for coordination and comment to the official(s) with jurisdiction over any Section 4(f) resource that may be affected by the Project, as well as applicable federal agencies. The official(s) with jurisdiction is determined based on the protected resource affected. FTA will provide the public an opportunity to review and comment on the Project's potential Section 4(f) effects in coordination with the EIS comment period.

3.4.2 Section 6(f) Coordination

Section 6(f) prohibits property acquired and improved with Land and Water Conservation Fund assistance from being converted to uses other than public outdoor recreation without the approval of the National Park Service (NPS) or its delegate (i.e., the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department [TPWD]). **The NPS has delegated authority as a Participating Agency to TPWD.** A conversion of property requires FTA to coordinate with TPWD. TPWD approval would occur after the EIS process and when the Lead Agencies have secured other federal environmental permits for the Project. FTA will provide the public an opportunity to review and comment on the Project's potential Section 6(f) effects in coordination with the EIS comment period.

3.4.3 Section 106 Consultation Process

~~Section 106 requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their undertakings on historic properties and to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment on such undertakings. FTA will consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer (i.e., Texas Historical Commission), potentially affected Indian tribes, representatives of local governments, certain individuals and organizations with a demonstrated interest in the Project, and the public during the Section 106 process. If FTA finds that there are historic properties that may be affected by the Project, FTA will notify all consulting parties, invite their views on the effects, and assess adverse effects, if any. FTA will provide consulting parties an opportunity to review and comment on the Project's potential Section 106 effects in coordination with the EIS comment period.~~

Section 106 consultation is required for all federal undertakings with the potential to affect historic properties regardless of the NEPA class of action. FTA is coordinating its Section 106 review with its environmental review under NEPA, identifying historic properties and assessing effects from the Project.

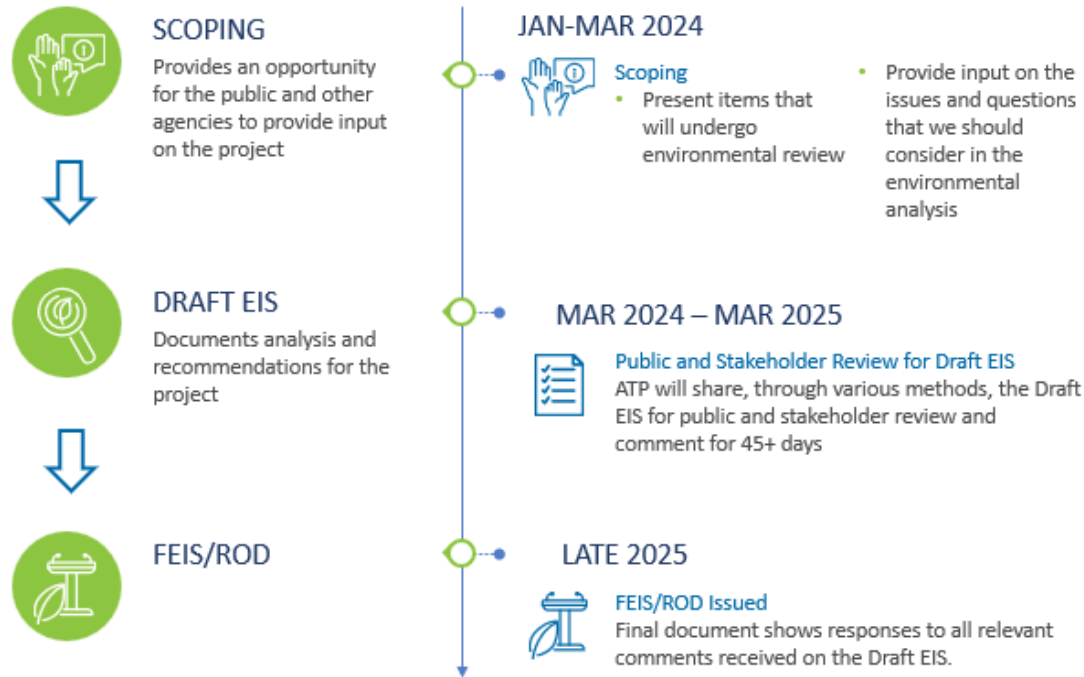
Section 106 Consulting Parties were provided an opportunity to review the cultural resource archeology and historic properties survey reports that included ATP's initial eligibility recommendations for the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) and the Consulting Parties to review and comment. FTA and ATP held a Consulting Party meeting on September 9, 2024. Following review on the cultural resource reports and the Consulting Party meeting, the consulting parties provided comments related to properties they felt should be considered historic, potential visual considerations to existing historic properties, potential changes to property access, considerations related to neighborhoods, and utility/construction easements. ATP responded to consulting party comments and will coordinate with the consulting parties during the Draft EIS public comment period.

4 Agency Coordination

The Lead Agencies view agency coordination as essential to the Project's development and have already done a great deal of coordination with partner agencies prior to entry into the environmental review process. The EIS will continue to build on this coordination and provide more formal opportunities for input. In addition, since the entire review process includes actions sometimes taken after the EIS is complete, such as required permits and authorizations, those agencies that have a permitting role will have an additional opportunity to provide input. Consistent with 23 U.S.C. 139(d)(8)(A), all federal reviews and authorizations for the Project will rely on the EIS. An overview of the environmental review process and anticipated future time lines are shown in **Figure 3** and discussed below.

Figure 3: Key Steps in the Environmental Review Process – **Estimated Timeline**

Key Steps in the Environmental Review Process



4.1 Cooperating Agencies

Cooperating agencies have a high degree of authority, responsibility, and involvement in the environmental review process. Cooperating agencies are agencies with jurisdiction by law or with special expertise regarding the Project. They may develop information and prepare environmental analyses, including portions of the EIS, where they have special expertise. They may adopt the EIS for their own purposes without recirculating it. Cooperating agencies should use the environmental review process to address any issue that could substantially delay or prevent it from granting a permit or other approval needed for the Project. The Lead Agencies have invited the agencies listed in **Table 1** to be cooperating agencies to the environmental review process for the Project.

Table 1: Cooperating Agencies

Agency	Involvement
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act; 33 U.S.C. 408 (Section 408); and Section 10 of the Rivers & Harbors Act of 1899
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Consultation on the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Environmental Justice

Texas Department of Transportation	Consultation on the transportation right-of-way
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	Consultation and approvals under Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act

4.2 Participating Agencies

Compared to cooperating agencies, participating agencies have a lower degree of responsibility and involvement in the environmental review process. Participating agencies are agencies that may have an interest in the Project. Participating agencies should identify, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the Project’s potential environmental or socioeconomic effects, and they should provide meaningful and timely input on unresolved issues. Like cooperating agencies, participating agencies should use the environmental review process to address any issue that could substantially delay the Project. The Lead Agencies have invited the agencies listed in **Table 2** to be participating agencies to the environmental review process for the Project.

Table 2: Participating Agencies

Agency
Federal Aviation Administration
Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region 6
Federal Highway Administration, Texas Division
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Austin Community College
Austin Independent School District
Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Capital Area Rural Transportation System
Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Central Health, the Travis County Healthcare District
Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority
City of Austin
Downtown Austin Alliance
Huston-Tillotson University
Lower Colorado River Authority
Travis County
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Region 11
Texas Historical Commission
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Agency
The University of Texas at Austin

4.3 Agency Coordination Opportunities

The environmental review process includes opportunities for cooperating and participating agencies to comment on the Project. The schedule in **Table 3** identifies these key opportunities.

Table 3: Proposed EIS Schedule

Coordination Point	Task	Date
Cooperating agency briefing	Briefing to cooperating agencies on the Project, Purpose & Need, range of alternatives, and environmental methodologies.	Meeting held May 22, 2024
Administrative Draft EIS review	Cooperating agencies review and comment (3-week review) on affected environment, anticipated effects, and proposed mitigation measures.	July/August September 2024
Second cooperating agency briefing	Optional meeting to resolve issues of concern.	September 18, 2024 Meeting held with TxDOT as requested
Draft EIS circulation and Public Comment Period	Release of Draft EIS and beginning of 60 day public comment period. Participating agencies and the public review the Draft EIS and provide comment.	October/November 2024 January 2025
Public Hearings on Draft EIS	Public hearings to receive comments on Draft EIS during public commenting period.	January 2025
Third cooperating agency briefing	Briefing on summary of public comments received and identification of selected design options.	To be determined
Administrative Draft Final EIS and ROD	Coordinate with Cooperating agencies on response to comments and changes to Draft EIS.	Summer –Fall 2025
Combined Final EIS and ROD available	FTA publishes Notice of Availability in <i>Federal Register</i> . No agency or public comment period is included.	Fall –December 2025

Both cooperating and participating agencies should review the proposed Project schedule above and either concur or object and provide comment on how the Lead Agencies could improve the schedule. The Lead Agencies will assume concurrence if no objections are received within 30 days of receipt of this Plan. **No comments on the estimated schedule were received on the April 2024 Draft Coordination Plan.**

5 Public Involvement

This section outlines the public involvement goals, types of outreach activities, and tools that the Lead Agencies have been using and will continue to use to engage the public. The section also discusses the commitment to reach communities with environmental justice concerns that may be affected by the Project.

5.1 Public Involvement Approach

The key objectives in ATP's public involvement approach include the following:

- Inform the public of the Project's purpose and need and identify and communicate the process and schedule for public participation.
- Actively seek public input throughout all stages of planning and Project development.
- Research and respond to public inquiries, suggestions, and ideas in the decision-making process.
- Provide opportunities for the public to affect major decisions before they are finalized.
- Publicize meetings and activities through a variety of diverse communication vehicles, and make the records available for public review.
- Provide the public with different, innovative opportunities and methods for accessing Project information throughout each Project phase.
- Ensure that diverse populations, including communities with environmental justice concerns, are engaged in the Project development process by making materials available in multiple formats, holding meetings in accessible facilities, and providing meeting and Project information to underserved populations.
- Communicate key Project milestones and accomplishments to show progress toward Project completion. Ensure transparency of the process by communicating the Project's needs, potential solutions, schedules, and budget information.
- Use information obtained through past and ongoing stakeholder interviews and public outreach efforts to enhance the Project team's knowledge of the area, key stakeholders, and community leaders.
- Create a Project record of public input, responses, and outreach activities.
- Continuously monitor and adapt outreach activities and tools to help reach affected and interested populations and interests.

5.2 Outreach Activities and Tools

The Lead Agencies have used multiple outreach activities and tools to engage the public and solicit their input on the Project. Outreach activities and tools include the following:

- Public meetings / open houses and comment periods
- Printed and electronic materials (e.g., fact sheets, maps)

- Online/virtual public meetings (e.g., webinars)
- Notifications (e.g., postcards, emails, flyers, online/print display advertisements)
- Community events and tabling
- Door-to-door and grassroots outreach
- Public input collection mechanisms (e.g., surveys, comment forms, interactive exercises)
- Social media
- Briefings and working group meetings (e.g., elected officials and community leader briefings, stakeholder and facilitated working group meetings, cross-coordination with other agencies)
- Legal notices
- Web-based outreach (e.g., ATP website, eblasts, media kits, interactive maps on website)

5.3 Outreach to Communities with Environmental Justice Concerns

ATP is committed to engaging with the community throughout planning and Project development. Opportunities for two-way dialogue ensure accountability and offer insight on ways that public feedback and participation can help move the program forward.

ATP will continue to strive to reach community members in an equitable manner, ensuring that diverse perspectives inform the development of the Project. This includes providing outreach opportunities to communities in ways that are accessible and convenient, and continuing to ensure that barriers to participation are lessened or removed.

Austin is a diverse community composed of people from different economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. ATP will employ the following strategies to guarantee that all members of the community have an opportunity to participate:

- Engage individuals in geographical areas that include historically disinvested populations, such as limited English proficiency; minority populations; low-income populations, and people with disabilities.
- Strategically plan to engage specific venues, events, or organizations within communities.
- Attend existing community events and incorporate a “go-where-they-gather” strategy for pop-up outreach events in environmental justice and limited English proficiency communities.
- Distribute event and Project information through groups and existing networks, such as chambers of commerce, schools, neighborhood and community groups, faith-based and community service organizations, and low-income assistance programs.
- Coordinate with essential services for information sharing and distribution through existing networks.

- Coordinate with apartment complexes in environmental justice and limited English proficiency communities for information sharing and distribution.
- Distribute information via print and broadcast channels, including local community papers, social media, and neighborhood magazines/publications. These publications also include Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese translations.
- Provide translation of meeting documents and web content on key initiatives into languages other than English upon request.

In addition, ATP will make the following available as part of all public outreach:

- ATP will translate the following key documents into Spanish:
 - Fact sheets
 - Scoping and EIS booklets
 - **Draft EIS Executive Summary and document chapters**
 - All materials produced for a virtual open house (e.g., presentation slides, recorded presentations, surveys)
 - Websites and web copy, including directions and content
 - Comment forms
 - Sign-in sheets
 - NEPA-required notices (i.e., notices in the legal notices section published in a newspaper of record)
 - Event registration pages
- ATP may translate additional documents into Spanish upon the community's request:
 - Frequently Asked Questions
 - Display boards
 - Presentations and virtual meeting transcripts
 - Ads for newspapers, radio, and social media
 - Flyers
 - Social media posts
- At the community member's request, ATP will offer a live translator / 1:1 meeting with a Spanish-speaking subject matter expert for any materials or reports.
- Spanish-language translators will be made available at all in-person and virtual public meetings (including open houses, workshops, and public hearings).
- American Sign Language interpreters will be available upon request for virtual and in-person meetings.

- A translator who speaks a language other than Spanish or English, such as Arabic or Vietnamese, will be made available at any public meeting upon request. To ensure accessibility:
 - translators/interpreters will be familiar with the Project and community;
 - requests for those needing special accommodations will be honored for all events, both in-person and virtual;
 - all photos and supporting materials added to the website and virtual open houses will be tagged for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance;
 - Spanish-translated materials and supporting materials will be provided with Spanish tags for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.

5.4 Public Coordination Opportunities

ATP is continuously meeting with community organizations and other stakeholders upon request, providing updates on the project elements and process. ATP is currently developing a plan for the fall 2024 **January through March 2025** engagement that will include a variety of in-person and virtual opportunities to present project information and respond to questions coinciding with the release of the Draft EIS, to solicit comments on the Draft EIS that will inform the Final EIS. **Information about public hearing locations, dates, and times is available at www.atptx.org.**

6 References

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